

IB/AP 11 English Summer Assignment

For this assignment you will read the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and while reading you should take notes on the information presented in the novel.

There are novels that are available for you from the school. Please take one before the end of the school year. You cannot take notes directly in a school copy of the book. If you would like to take notes directly in the novel, you will need to purchase your own copy.

Attached you will find information that details how to closely analyze both fiction texts and poetry. These are skills we will focus on all next school year. Please read through this information prior to reading the novel. As you read through *To Kill a Mockingbird*, feel free to use the skills described in the handout to interact with the text. If you annotate the novel, you can use post-it notes to record your thinking. If you purchase your own text, feel free to write directly in the novel.

Annotating and interacting with the novel will help you with the assessments of this text that will occur during the first two weeks of the new school year. We will be using *To Kill a Mockingbird* for a large project and an essay at the start of the school year. It is extremely important that you read and understand the novel *before* the start of the school year.

If you have any questions over the summer, please e-mail me at:

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(Note: There is an apostrophe in my email that needs to be included otherwise the email will not reach me.)

Close Reading: Analyzing Poetry and Passages of Fiction

What Is Close Reading?

Close reading, sometimes called explication of text, means developing an understanding of a text that is based on its small details and the larger ideas those details evoke or suggest. Although you might worry that taking a work apart somehow lessens its power or the pleasure of reading it, the opposite is usually true. By looking at the various parts of a poem or passage of fiction, you come to appreciate the writer's artistry and understand how a writer uses various techniques to make a statement, suggest an emotion, or convey an idea. John Ciardi's classic book on analyzing poetry is entitled *How Does a Poem Mean?*—and that's the purpose of close reading: to analyze not just *what* a piece of literature means but *how* that meaning comes about. When you write a close analysis essay, you start with the larger ideas you've discovered and use the small details—the words themselves and how they're arranged—to support your interpretation of the meaning of the piece.

The key to close reading is, of course, observation—taking note of what you read and what you think about it, and asking questions. The good news is that the texts you are asked to read closely are usually not that long, which means you can read them several times. Each time you read a text, you will notice more and more. Later in the chapter we'll suggest specific strategies—such as annotating and using a graphic organizer—that will help you organize what you notice, pose questions about your observations, and even answer the questions you've posed. Let's start with what you notice when you first read a poem or passage of fiction.

First-Impression Questions

Take a look at this excerpt from *My Antonia* by Willa Cather, a novel about early settlers in the American West, narrated by a young boy who moves from Virginia to Nebraska to be brought up by his grandparents. As you read, jot down some questions that arise from your first impressions.

I sat down in the middle of the garden, where snakes could scarcely approach unseen, and leaned my back against a warm yellow pumpkin. There were some

ground-cherry bushes growing along the furrows, full of fruit. I turned back the papery triangular sheaths that protected the berries and ate a few. All about me giant grasshoppers, twice as big as any I had ever seen, were doing acrobatic feats among the dried vines. The gophers scurried up and down the ploughed ground. There in the sheltered draw-bottom the wind did not blow very hard, but I could hear it singing its humming tune up on the level, and I could see the tall grasses wave. The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers. Queer little red bugs came out and moved in slow squadrons around me. Their backs were polished vermillion, with black spots. I kept as still as I could. Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep.

[1918]

After just one reading, you can probably get a sense of the tone of this passage and the mood it creates; you might even be able to imagine a few things about its narrator, its setting, and even its themes. You will surely have questions about how and why Cather's style is so distinct, and that is the first step in reading closely.

Here are some questions that a first reading may raise. Your questions may be similar to the ones here, or you may have come up with completely different ones.

- What part do the snakes play in this passage about happiness?
- What might it mean that the passage is set in a garden?
- How big is that pumpkin? How big are the grasshoppers, really?
- What makes the objects in the passage so vivid?
- Why does the narrator connect happiness and death?
- How does the narrator fit—literally and figuratively—into the landscape?
- How does the passage change from beginning to end?

What's important at this point is not necessarily answering the questions but simply asking them. By posing questions, you're engaging with the text—you're reading actively.

Annotation

Annotation is simply noting on the page words that strike you, phrases that confuse or thrill you, or places where you want to talk back to the speaker or narrator. Your goal is to record ideas and impressions for later analysis. If you are not allowed to write in your book, make your annotations on sticky notes attached to the outside margins of the pages. Why bother to do this? Here's what well-known scholar and avid reader Mortimer Adler says:

Why is marking up a book indispensable to reading? First, it keeps you awake. (And I don't mean merely conscious; I mean awake.) In the second place, reading, if it is active, is thinking, and thinking tends to express itself in words, spoken or written. The marked book is usually the thought-through book. Finally, writing helps you remember the thought you had, or the thoughts the author expressed. (*How to Read a Book*)

So whether you use sticky notes, highlight passages, or write comments directly in the margins, annotation helps you become a better reader. There are no hard-and-fast rules for annotating properly, but the following approach is a good way to get started.

On your first reading, circle or highlight words or phrases that are interesting or unfamiliar, as well as any elements of style. Note in the margins or on a sticky note why you are circling or highlighting these words. If you just circle, or just highlight, you will soon forget why you did so. Don't worry if you can't remember the literary term for what you find; just describe it. Note words that stand out for their beauty or oddity as well as words you need to look up. Don't hesitate to make an educated guess at their meaning.

On your second reading, move from investigating individual words and phrases to making larger-scale observations. If you see patterns, words, or ideas that seem to connect to one another or are repeated, circle those words or ideas and use lines to connect them. Note shifts in tone or viewpoint. Underline lines or passages that you think are important for understanding the meaning of the poem or passage. Look for themes in the piece. Pose questions. You might want to use colored pencils to differentiate your first-reading annotations from your second-reading annotations. Think of this as a work in progress, an emerging interpretation. You may change your mind later, but annotating will record how your thinking develops.

After the third reading, write for three to five minutes about the work. Paraphrase it, and then react to it as a whole and to its parts. Respond to the work in any way you like. Informal, exploratory writing can help you begin to understand what you read. Here is an example of annotation, using William Shakespeare's Sonnet 29:

First Reading

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes, Personification
 I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, ? Look up
 And look upon myself and curse my fate, 5
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
 Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, ? odd use of this word
 Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
 With what I most enjoy contented least,
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state, 10
 Like to the lark at break of day arising Long simile!
 From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
 For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

[1609]

Second Reading

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes, Personification
 I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries, ? Look up
 And look upon myself and curse my fate, Contrast: cries vs. sings
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope, Repeated references to wealth ... but of hope of friends
 Featured like him, like him with friends possessed, ? odd use of this word
 Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
 With what I most enjoy contented least,
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state, Shift in tone
 Like to the lark at break of day arising Long simile!
 From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate
 For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
 That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Key! They're poor, but they have each other
 Juxtaposing heaven & earth. Earthly things (wealth) not as important as love.
 Repetition of "state"
 Dual meaning?

[1609]